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The Nuremberg War Crimes Trials

By Sharon Fabian

It was the end of World War II, and the Nazis had finally been defeated. The leader of the Nazis, Adolf Hitler, had committed suicide, but what was to be done with the other high-ranking Nazi officials who were now held as prisoners of war by the Allies? Under their leadership, millions of people had been murdered before and during the war. What should happen to these men now?

The Allies had been meeting to discuss this problem even before the war ended. The United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union decided to have a trial and prosecute these men for their crimes. They created the Nuremberg Court and wrote rules for how the court would operate.

The defendants were 22 Nazi leaders who were being held as prisoners in one of the four Allied countries. The prosecutors were attorneys from all four countries. Charges were brought against the defendants on four counts, and each of the Allied countries took the responsibility of prosecuting certain parts.

The first count was conspiracy. Conspiracy meant that the defendants had planned ahead to attack other countries. The second count was conducting a war of aggression. This meant an actual attack on another country. The third count was war crimes. War crimes included actions that violated the traditional laws of war, such as bombing a civilian population center. The fourth count was crimes against humanity. This included actions that are generally condemned by people all over the world, such as setting up concentration camps.

The immediate purpose of the trial was to condemn the actions of the Nazis and to punish the Nazi leaders. A more long-term goal was to establish an international court that would be ready to deal with inhumane acts if they occurred again in the future.

The Chief Prosecutor was Justice Robert Jackson, a Supreme Court Justice from the United States. In his opening statement, he said, "The crimes which we seek to condemn and punish have been so calculated, so malignant, and so devastating, that civilization cannot

tolerate their being ignored."

The courtroom in Nuremberg, Germany, had the usual judges' bench, witness stand, tables for the defense, and tables for the prosecution. It had stations for guards to watch the prisoners. It also had an area for interpreters, since the trial was conducted in four languages. It had press area for reporters and a screen for showing films.

The trial began on November 20, 1945, at 10:00 in the morning. On November 21, all of the defendants pleaded "not guilty." On November 29, the prosecutors introduced as evidence a film that showed the horrors of the concentration camps. With the help of the translators, thousands of documents captured during the war were introduced, too. Concentration camp survivors testified as witnesses. Finally, on October 1 of the next year, 1946, the main trial was over. Three of the defendants were found not guilty. Eight were sentenced to long prison terms, and eleven were sentenced to death by hanging.

So, the immediate goal of the Nuremberg Court was met. The actions of the Nazis had been condemned, and leaders had been punished. Its second goal was more difficult, and it has not been fully accomplished yet. Since the time of the Nuremberg Trials, an international court, under the authority of the United Nations, has met on a few occasions - about situations in Yugoslavia and Rwanda. In July 2002, a permanent international criminal court was finally established. However, it cannot at this time prosecute the crime of aggression.

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Questions

- _____ 1. _____ were tried at Nuremberg.
- A. all of the Nazis
 - B. concentration camp survivors
 - C. Nazi leaders
 - D. Hitler
- _____ 2. The Nuremberg Trials were held at the end of _____.
- A. 1946
 - B. World War I
 - C. World War II
 - D. 2000

[illegible]

- _____ 3. _____ main charges were brought against the defendants.
- A. one
 - B. two
 - C. three
 - D. four
- _____ 4. War crimes means _____.
- A. crimes committed during a war
 - B. refusing to serve in the army
 - C. acts that violate the traditional rules of war
 - D. killing enemy soldiers in a war
- _____ 5. Crimes that are especially inhumane, and would be condemned by people all over the world, are called _____.
- A. crimes against justice
 - B. war crimes
 - C. civil crimes
 - D. crimes against humanity
- _____ 6. Of the 22 defendants at the trial, _____ were found guilty.
- A. nineteen
 - B. three
 - C. eleven
 - D. eight
- _____ 7. Chief Justice Jackson _____.
- A. defended the Nazi leaders
 - B. tried to prove that the Nazi leaders were guilty
 - C. was not at the trial
 - D. none of the above
- _____ 8. Since the time of the Nuremberg Trials, an international court has met about situations in _____.
- A. Yugoslavia
 - B. Rwanda
 - C. both
 - D. neither

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